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# MENORAH



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## HISTORY AND MORAL JUDGMENT

*The Abandonment of the Jews:  
America and the Holocaust,  
1941–1945*

By David S. Wyman  
Pantheon Books

A Review essay by Roger W. Smith

Despite the numerous retellings of the horror and the attempts by scholars to understand the Holocaust, it still raises unresolved, agonizing questions. Why did it happen? How was it possible for civilized persons to torture, maim, and destroy other human beings? Why was there not more resistance by the victims? Why were the Protestant churches largely inactive and the Vatican silent? Where was God? Why was it that the greatest crime in history was of only marginal interest to the Allies? To these questions, David Wyman, a historian at the University of Massachusetts, a Protestant, and a friend of Zionism, adds another: Why did America make so little effort to rescue Jews from annihilation?

The standard reply to Wyman's question is that rescue was not possible and that the only way to save Jewish lives was to win the war as quickly as possible. Wyman clearly demonstrates that these answers are inadequate. But in so doing, he reveals aspects of American life during the Holocaust—basic attitudes, the failures of public institutions, the callousness of public officials, the intellectual poverty of the media, the conflicts among American Jewish organizations, and, in some cases, priorities higher than rescue—that, given the Nazi attempt at genocide, are profoundly disturbing.

Wyman is not the first to have raised the question of rescue, but his book has such range and the information he has uncovered is presented with such care, that it is likely to figure in any future discussion of America's response to the Holocaust. In a certain sense, though, what makes this such a powerful and disturbing book is the assumption he makes about the writing of history. For Wyman, as for the Puritans, history is a story of good and evil, of moral obligations thrust upon us and then betrayed, not so much by a malevolent heart as by indifference. Or we betray our obligations and thus our fellow men and women, because we have too little faith—because we cannot do everything, we conclude that nothing can be done; because we cannot stop the slaughter, we rule out attempts at rescue.

Though these beliefs may strike historians as quaint or worse and be suspect because they grow out of religious commitment, Wyman in fact stands on firm psychological ground given his topic. A sense of moral obligation for, a sensitivity to, and a concern for the sufferings of the Jews, and a belief in the possibility of action, were preconditions of any effective rescue program. In one way or another, as Wyman indicates, these were lacking in America throughout the Holocaust.

*The Abandonment of the Jews* is, then, an important study in the history of morality, set against the background of some of the most horrifying events in human experience. On the surface, it is a straightforward account of the politics of rescue that took place in the United States over a four-year period. On a deeper level, the book is a study of moral obligation and moral failure in a particular time and place. But there is another dimension that is perhaps more universal—issues about information and understanding, human solidarity,

the limits of the imagination, the nature of moral judgment, and the question of whether individuals, for better or worse, can make a difference in a world seemingly dominated by large-scale institutions and the impersonal forces of history. On this level his answers are often illuminating, but it is here also that he weakens to some extent both his descriptive account and his moral assessment of the politics of rescue. He does so by not distinguishing between "belief" and "understanding" and through a partially flawed conception of moral judgment, one that he shares with many of us. I shall return to these problems later.

A mother and daughter were at the head of a line going into the gas chambers of Belzec. As they entered, a witness heard the child say, "Mother, it's dark, it's so dark, and I was being so good." No one can say whether this mother and child might have been saved had the United States in November 1942, when it knew the worst, begun a serious effort to rescue as many as possible of those facing extermination. But it is probable that had the United States set up a war refugee board early in the war, several hundred thousand Jews could have been saved without in any way hampering the war effort. As it was, no rescue effort was begun until 14 months after the U.S. State Department had confirmed reports of the systematic mass murder of Jews. Yet even though the rescue effort did not begin until January 1944, some 200,000 Jews, most of them in Hungary and Rumania, were saved from destruction. And had the Allies bombed Auschwitz in July and August 1944, or the rail lines leading to it, 10,000 persons each day would have been spared. Though thousands of planes struck within 50 miles of Auschwitz, and on two occasions within five miles of the death

camp itself, no attempt was ever made to hinder its operation. The War Department had decided years before that rescue was not part of its mission: for the military, Europe's Jews were an irrelevancy.

There were other possibilities for rescue. In early 1943 Rumania offered to release 70,000 Jews and transport them on its own ships to places of refuge designated by the Allies; other satellite countries, such as Hungary and Bulgaria, might have followed suit. The State Department refused to pursue the matter. Neutral countries, such as Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and Sweden, could have been pressured to allow Jews temporary refuge, with a guarantee by the Allies of resettlement as soon as havens of rescue could be set up outside Europe. Had this been done, a continuing flow of refugees could have escaped the Nazi horror. But such places of refuge for Jews were few and far between: a few thousand were accommodated in camps in North Africa, and late in the war the United States accepted 982 Jewish and Catholic refugees for temporary haven in upstate New York. At the same time, Britain continued its pre-war restriction on Jewish settlement in Palestine, while the United States accepted only 21,000 immigrants, mostly Jewish, during the entire period from Pearl Harbor to the end of the war. Ninety percent of the existing quotas—190,000 openings—went unfilled while the mass murder of Jews continued.

There were other ways, too, to save lives. More money could have been distributed to refugee organizations in Europe to support underground groups, facilitate escapes, hide the persecuted, and supply food. And Jews could have been told repeatedly of the fate that Hitler had planned for them, of what the deportations actually meant. They could have been warned to hide, flee, and resist as best they could.

Thus, though the only way to stop the Holocaust itself was by winning the war, it was possible to save lives through rescue efforts. The moral duty to do so was overwhelming. Why, then, did the American effort begin so late and why did it offer much less than it might have? Wyman's account, as befits a historian, is specific and detailed: he discusses

the State Department, the British Foreign Office, the American people, Franklin Roosevelt, the media, the churches, and various American Jewish organizations. In different ways, each of these fails in terms of either solidarity with the victims or faith in the possibility of rescue.

Wyman's categories are valid, but they are also narrow. He misses the tendency for both the Departments of State and War to place bureaucratic routine and a narrow conception of their mission above the value of human life. And he all but misses an issue crucial to both the reasons for the behavior of the persons and groups he discusses and a genuine assessment of their moral responsibility: the difference between "believing" and "understanding." This is a matter treated with great skill (and less moral harshness) by Walter Laqueur in a related book, *The Terrible Secret*. To possess information about the killing of the Jews was not in itself to understand what was taking place; to believe that a process of extermination was underway was not necessarily to grasp the full significance of it. Even those who "knew" had little idea of what a holocaust actually meant. It was only when the camps (which were not even the extermination centers) were liberated that the horror set in. One might add that, in many ways, the world still does not understand: the United Nations Convention on Genocide, for example, defines the crime in such a way that "liquidating" 20 million Kulaks is not considered to be genocide, but transferring children from one group to another is.

Though some of Wyman's interpretations may be questioned, his major conclusions do rest on massive documentation. Individually and collectively, they point to a moral disaster of the highest order.

1. The American people were unwilling to accept a large number of refugees. Since the 1930s there had been strong "nativist" trends, and the fear of unemployment continued; there was also some anti-Semitism. At the same time, most Americans did not know what was happening to the Jews in Europe. The media gave little coverage to the atrocities, and when reported, they were generally merged with other news about the war. Coverage of the Holocaust was sporadic and presented with little

emphasis; it was treated as minor news.

2. Franklin Roosevelt took little interest in the plight of the Jews. He allowed 14 months to pass before he created the War Refugee Board and then gave it little support. He avoided speaking on these matters and referred questions about the Jews to the State Department. He acted in terms of political expediency: he was afraid that the administration could lose support if it were viewed as "pro-Jewish."

3. The State Department and the British Foreign Office saw rescue as a threat rather than an opportunity. They were afraid that Hitler might in fact release large numbers of Jews to the Allies. Where could they go? Refugees were unwelcome everywhere in the world, a burden to be avoided. Inevitably, pressure would be placed on Britain to open Palestine and on America to take in more refugees. Unwillingness to offer refuge was the central cause for an inadequate response to the whole refugee issue.

4. The churches of America were virtually silent about both the Holocaust and the need for rescue.

5. American Jewish leaders attempted to bring to the attention of both the public and government officials the situation of the Jews in Europe. They were unable, however, to mount a sustained or unified effort, spent much time fighting among themselves, and, in the case of the Zionists, did not place priority on rescue. Zionists concluded that there was little hope for rescue and that, in any case, the disasters that had accompanied the Diaspora, Hitler being only the most recent, would end only with the recovery of the homeland and the creation of a Jewish state.

Moreover, most of the Jews who held high political office were not strong supporters of rescue. Of the seven Jews in Congress, only one, Emanuel Celler, was consistent on the issue. And President Roosevelt's special counsel, Samuel Rosenman, advised the President to avoid references to Jews in his public statements as they would fuel anti-Semitism and stir up opposition to the administration. On the other hand, nearly 85 percent of the funds of the War Refugee Board came from voluntary contributions by American Jews.



The main lines of moral fault are clear in Wyman's account, though not etched in black and white. It is all the more unfortunate, then, that he occasionally resorts to excess in assigning responsibility. When he says, for example, that the "Nazis were the murderers, but we were the all too passive accomplices," it is appropriate to ask: but who, exactly, is "we?" Is it the majority of Americans who did not know until late 1944 that the Holocaust was taking place? In what sense were they "accomplices" if they had no knowledge of events? Was it the servicemen who were giving their lives to defeat the evils of Nazism? If not them, who, and how many? But then Wyman is no different from many of us in shifting responsibility from specific persons to larger groups, even humankind. As one of my students said, "There is an Idi Amin ethics in each one of us."

Wyman, however, goes on to show how confused at times he really is about moral judgment. I pick the following example because in other reviews it has been applauded as an example of Wyman's moral sensitivity. "The Holocaust was certainly a Jewish tragedy. But it was not *only* a Jewish tragedy. It was also a Christian tragedy, a tragedy for Western civilization, and a tragedy for all humankind." Here Wyman conflates the horrible sufferings of the Jewish people with the tragedy of Christians failing to live up to their religious commitment to help those in need. He does not indicate what the tragedy of humankind was, but presumably it was that men and women assumed the role of bystanders—became what Elie Wiesel calls "faces in the window"—and failed to perform their moral duty.

There are tragedies here, but to paper over the enormous differences is to subvert morality at its core. Even if we put aside the question of suffering (and how could we?), the Jews had no choice—destruction was forced on them; Christians and other bystanders had a choice—their moral failures are their own. Moreover, when Wyman speaks of the tragedy of humankind, he misses an important point about the very nature of genocide. That many human beings stood by and did nothing is not a matter of tragedy but rather shame. The tragedy for humankind is that

genocide distorts and alters the very meaning of "humankind." To eliminate a whole people is to reduce the essential plurality of the human condition—to destroy for all time particular biological and cultural possibilities. In this sense, genocide is a crime not only against a particular people, but against all people. Genocide, of course, is a crime in another sense: for a particular group to appropriate to itself the right to determine what groups are human is a threat to the existence of all other humans.

Wyman writes about the past, but it is out of concern for the present and the future that he asks: Would the American response to the Holocaust be different today? Would Americans again be unknowing, uncaring, and content to leave the problem to the victims to solve? One way to give a tentative answer is to extend his question (there are also strong moral reasons for this) so that it refers not only to the Holocaust, but to any mass victimization or suffering.

If the Holocaust could be ignored for years, as Wyman demonstrates it was, how can we be confident about attempts to help the victims of the future—victims not only of genocide, but of starvation, political repression, and the like?

*Roger W. Smith is professor of government, The College of William and Mary.*

### JEWIS IN OLD CHINA: SOME NEW FINDINGS

By Sidney Shapiro

In recent years friends from the West have visited me at my home in Beijing and said: "Your name is Shapiro and you've been living in China for over 30 years, so of course you know all about the Chinese Jews. What's the story?"

Actually I know very little. As much out of embarrassment as curiosity, I began looking into the matter, starting with the research of western Sinologists. I found an astonishing assortment of books, articles, and treatises, well in excess of 200 in number, written from the seventeenth century onward in English, French, German, Latin, Italian, Por-

tuguese, Russian, Japanese, and Yiddish. In their original languages and in translation, these were disseminated throughout the world, primarily in academic circles, but some in the popular press as well.

What sparked it off was the arrival at the Jesuit Mission in Beijing, one day in June 1601, of an elderly Chinese gentleman named Ai Tian. He wanted to know about this foreign religion which, he had heard, worshipped only one God like his own. Father Matteo Ricci, the Italian Superior of the Mission, hospitably showed him around, thinking he might be part of the Nestorian Christian sect that had preceded the Jesuits to China by a thousand years.

In the chapel Ai saw a painting of the Madonna and Child on one side of the altar and a picture of John the Baptist (when very young) on the other side. He assumed them to be Rebecca with Jacob and Esau. Noticing also on the walls portraits of the Four Evangelists, he asked whether they were "four of the 12." Ricci thought he was talking about the Twelve Apostles, but Ai actually meant four of Jacob's 12 sons, progenitors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Further conversation revealed that Ai was a Jew, a member of a Jewish community that had been in Kaifeng near the Yellow River in Honan province for centuries, practicing its religion and maintaining a synagogue. During the next 150 years, Catholic missionaries flocked to Kaifeng. Their accounts of what they saw were published in several languages and circulated widely throughout Europe.

Their interest stemmed primarily from the beliefs that predictions of Christ's birth had deliberately been removed from the Old Testament by the Babylonian academicians who, between the fourth and seventh centuries, prepared the vast body of interpretative material known as the Talmud. If the Old Testament of the Kaifeng Jews was pre-Christian in origin, and indeed foretold the birth of Jesus, wouldn't that prove the old scriptures had been tampered with, that the Jews had been deceived by the talmudic rabbis? And wouldn't that pave the way for a second coming of Christ?

While the Jesuits were unable to find proof of talmudic falsifications, they did learn a number of things about the lives and customs of the Kaifeng Jews and wrote some informative reports. Others, of diverse interests and from various lands, followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and added to the store of knowledge.

Most of the western scholars were, of necessity, limited in their understanding of Chinese language, history, and culture. Yet virtually nothing was published abroad reflecting the views of the Chinese themselves. This was in no way due to a lack of academic diligence on the part of Sinologists. For one thing, Chinese research on the Jews did not begin until the eve of the twentieth century. For another, Chinese treatises about the "Israelites," as they were called, were not widely published even in China until very recently.

I decided the best contribution I could make would be to collect all the material I could obtain on the subject by Chinese scholars and put it together in a book. But finding Chinese research turned out to be much more difficult than I had anticipated.

Traveling by plane, train, and bus in the autumn of 1982, I visited Fuzhou, Quanzhou, Xiamen (Amoy), Guanzhou (Canton), Hangzhou, Yangshou, Shanghai, Ningbo, Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, and Yinchuan. I met noted historians, archaeologists, and sociologists. They were helpful and provided valuable leads. Several promised to write special articles for me. All agreed that the new government policy of actively encouraging academic studies had created a favorable environment for research. Those whose field was foreign religions said they were already probing into the development in China of such creeds as Nestorianism and Manicheism, but had not previously considered Judaism. They were pleased I had called it to their attention and said it was a "blank spot," which they would attempt to fill. In Beijing I also had a number of enthusiastic responses and soon was able to include some remarkable new findings regarding Chinese Jews.

As a result I was able to translate, edit, and compile a volume of 12 essays of prominent Chinese scholars on the Jews of China. Together they

trace the history of the Chinese Jews from their beginnings to the present. The book is called *Jews in Old China: Studies by Chinese Scholars*, published by Hippocrene Books. Like scholars the world over, the Chinese disagree among themselves on some of the events and with their foreign counterparts. Although their accounts are intricate, I found them highly stimulating.

As the Chinese see it, Jewish events that are allegedly or, in fact, related to Chinese history, are the following:

- 722 B.C.: Assyria conquers Israel and exiles the ten tribes, which gradually vanish. Various modern travelers claim to have found remnants of them among the Tibetans, the Chinese Qiang people, and the American Indians. The Chinese see no proof for any of these.

- Eighth century B.C.: Isaiah prophesizes that the Jews will return from "Sinim." Some westerners assert this means China, originating from Ch'in (Qin), the first dynasty to rule over a unified country. But, say the Chinese, there was no Ch'in (Qin) dynasty until 221 B.C., five centuries later, so such derivation was impossible. In any event, Sinim is now believed to have meant Aswan in southern Egypt.

- Fifth and fourth centuries B.C.: The Persians move a large segment of the Jewish population to Persia and Media, south of the Caspian Sea.

- 176 B.C.: Oppressive rule of Antiochus IV.

- 175 B.C.: Claimed arrival in Bombay by Kolaba Jews.

- 164 B.C.: Maccabees reconquer Jerusalem, thereafter celebrated as Hanukkah by most Jews, but not by those in Bombay or Kaifeng. It is believed that this proves the Jews left their homeland before the Maccabean victory.

It was during the Tang dynasty (618–907 A.D.) that Persian and Arab merchants began sailing to China in large numbers. Jews who by then had been living among them for half a millenium came with them. Because the Jews were similar to them in physical appearance, wore the same clothes, spoke the same language, and even adopted Arab or Persian names, the Chinese could not distinguish among them and placed them all in the same category:

"se mu ren"—people with colored eyes. Some settled in seaport cities such as Canton, Quanzhou, Yanzhou, and Ningbo. Some moved north up the Grand Canal and the Bian River to Bianliang (Kaifeng) and other northern cities.

There is some evidence that Jews traveled with the caravans that came overland via the Silk Road, perhaps in the first and second centuries, and certainly to the middle of Tang. In the arid deserts of Xinjiang, once known as Chinese Turkestan, two important finds were made in the early years of this century. One was a letter, never sent, by a Persian Jew. It was written in Persian, using Hebrew script, and on paper which, at that time, only China manufactured. The other was a scrap of a Hebrew prayer also on paper.

But caravan treks were arduous, long, and dangerous, not the kind of trips on which a man would bring his family. Only when the constant wars among the small kingdoms in Xinjiang made the Silk Road too risky, and sea trade opened up in the eighth century, did fairly large-scale immigration become possible. This is the conclusion of the majority of Chinese historians.

So far no tangible relics have been unearthed testifying to a Jewish presence in earlier times, although Chinese silks, which could only have come by land caravans including Jews, were popular among Roman women.

For Northern Song (960–1127), we have an exact date, 998—and the name of the ruling emperor, Zhen Zong, set forth by a young Chinese scholar—as the specific time of the arrival of a group of Jews in Kaifeng. He proves this by an immigration registry which, he claims, could only mean that the arrivals were Jews.

After the Mongols conquered China and established their Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), many Jews were mentioned in official documents. The Arabic "Jahud," the Persian "Djuhd," both from the Hebrew "Yehudi," were transliterated into Chinese phonetic equivalents such as "Zhuhu," "Zhuwu," or "Zhuhe," in laws and regulations concerning taxes and military service. Several Chinese historians believe that when the Mongol armies returned from their conquests



in the Middle East and southern Europe, many Jews came with them, either voluntarily or as captives. From a Yuan regulation referring to Jews "wherever they may be," it is obvious they had communities in various parts of China.

The fullest documentation we have of the history of the Jews in China was written, in Chinese, by the Jews themselves. Three stone inscriptions dated 1489, 1512, and 1663, engraved to commemorate rebuildings of the Kaifeng synagogue, plus a tablet dated 1679 of the Zhao clan, together comprise a fairly complete story and also create considerable controversy. They called themselves "Israelites" and said that they came from the "Western Regions," a vague term which embraced India and the Middle East. But they disagreed on the date of arrival, the 1489 inscription saying Song (960–1279), the 1512 inscription saying Han (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), and the 1663 inscription saying Zhou (1066 B.C.–256 B.C.). The later the inscription, the earlier and therefore more venerable the claimed arrival date. But the inscriptions contain a wealth of material on religious practices, philosophical concepts, and relations with other Jewish communities.

The consensus of Chinese scholars is that 1163, the date given for the construction of the first Kaifeng synagogue, is probably correct and that the Jews must have arrived a few decades earlier. They also agree with the statement in the 1679 tablet setting their number on reaching Kaifeng as 73 clans of some 500 families. Most of the argument centers around where the Jews lived between the time of the Diaspora in the first century A.D. and their arrival in China, probably in the tenth century.

Chinese historians note that except for a contingent that migrated to Alexandria in Egypt, the majority of the Jews moved east into Arabia, Persia, Central Asia, and India. One school believes the Kaifeng Jews came from India since the inscriptions at the synagogue state that they brought cotton goods, 苧苧 manufactured in India but not yet in China. Annotations to the Kaifeng prayerbooks, however, are partly in Persian without a single word of any of the Indian dialects. Of course, they could have called at an Indian port en route, or even spent some years

there, but apparently not long enough to have lost their Persian.

It is true that there were and still are Jews in India, near Bombay as well as in Khaibar. About 40 miles south of Bombay is the seaport of Kolaba. In its Junjira district there are people who call themselves "Ben-i-Israel." They say they fled from the persecution of Greek Seleucid King Antiochus IV in 176 B.C. and settled in Kolaba a year later. The Khaibar Jews claim an arrival in the sixth century B.C. after the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem.

The Durani, an ethnic group in Afghanistan, also refer to themselves as "Ben-i-Israel" and claim descent from "Afghan," an alleged grandson of King Saul, who preceded David as king of the Israelites.

Some of the people of Kashmir, who strongly resemble the Jews of biblical times, say they are descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes.

All the foregoing stories are noted by Chinese scholars in my book without judging their authenticity. They agree that there were Jewish populations in those areas as well as places like Balkh (formerly Bactria), Bokhara, and Samarkand in Central Asia from which it was possible to enter China overland via the Silk Road, or to move south to the Indian seacoast and travel by ship.

Several other Chinese cities undoubtedly hosted Jewish communities. The beautiful city of Hangzhou became the capital of what was known as Southern Song (1127–1279) when the Song court fled Kaifeng under the onslaughts of the conquering Golden Tartars. Yang Yu, a Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) historian, noted that "all the officials in the Hangzhou Sugar Bureau are rich Jews and Muslims."

Jews in Yangzhou, Ningxia, and Ningbo are credited in the Kaifeng inscriptions with contributing scriptures and money for the restoration of the Kaifeng synagogue in the fifteenth century after it was destroyed by a Yellow River flood. I visited Ningbo, a large seaport south of Shanghai, in 1982 and was shown the former "Persian Street" where the "Persian Hotel" once stood. My Chinese hosts explained that in ancient times all persons from the Middle East, including Jews, were loosely termed "people with colored eyes," or "Arabs" or "Persians."

Fujian's major seaport from the seventh to the fourteenth century was Quanzhou. Chinese scholars quote Andrew of Perugia, Catholic bishop of that city, who complained in a letter to his superiors in Rome: "We are able to preach freely and unmolested, but of the Jews and Saracens none is converted."

Marco Polo, Chinese historians remind us, spent several years in the court of the Yuan Mongols, then called Khanbaliq and now Beijing. The Venetian in the thirteenth century wrote in his famous *Travels* that the emperor Kublai Khan reproached the Jews for deriding Nestorian Christian rebels who were defeated in battle in 1287 despite the cross emblazoned on their banners.

Chinese scholars believe the list of cities once containing Jewish communities can and will be expanded as historical and archaeological research progresses in China. It seems unlikely that most major commercial and cultural centers did not have at least some Jewish settlements.

Kaifeng hosted the largest Jewish community and lasted the longest. From 1163 to 1663, its synagogue was built and restored ten times, proof of the strength of its congregation and the support they received from Jews in other cities. But as China's power dwindled and declined, so did the Jewish communities. By the mid-nineteenth century, most of them had vanished, except for a few Kaifeng families. The synagogue was no more, having been sold by the impoverished survivors. Through centuries of intermarriage, the remaining Jews looked and acted entirely Chinese. No one could read Hebrew or conduct religious services. A handful knew they were of Jewish descent, but knew little about Judaism, its history or culture.

In a rather makeshift Kaifeng museum, I saw two of the tablets commemorating various restorations of the Kaifeng synagogue. The stones were so badly eroded that they were almost undecipherable. The site of the old synagogue, already an unsightly bog hole at the turn of the century, is now built over with new construction.

There have been minor influxes of Jews. The nineteenth century brought a number of Jewish settlers

from India and Iraq, congregating mainly in Shanghai. Jews fleeing the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia tended to become fur traders and merchants in China's northeast (Manchuria) and in the port of Tianjin (Tientsin). A fairly large contingent of German and Austrian Jews who had escaped from Nazi persecution were living in a Shanghai ghetto in 1947 when I was requested by the U.S. Consulate to explain to them that American visas were hard to come by and that American streets were not really paved with gold.

From everything I have noted in Chinese and western studies, and from my own observations, I have come to the following tentative conclusions. The first sizable contingent of Jews came by ship from Persia, via India, and landed in the major seaport of Quanshou, in Fujian (Fukien) around the tenth century A.D. In the eleventh century, the majority of them (their children or grandchildren) traveled up the Grand Canal from Yangzhou to Kaifeng, then to the capital of China. There they built a synagogue in the twelfth century. Other Jews, also mainly arriving by sea from India and the Middle East, settled in smaller numbers in other Chinese cities.

The Jews lived in freedom and equality with the Han Chinese, as did all foreign races and religious groups. Gradually they adopted Chinese customs and abandoned their own. Finally, by the mid-nineteenth century, there was no one who could read Hebrew or conduct religious services. The Kaifeng synagogue had been the center of social and cultural, as well as religious, life. With its physical disintegration, the Jewish community dispersed and vanished. Other Jewish communities suffered the same fate, even earlier than the one in Kaifeng.

Today in China only a few relics remain. The Jews as a people and Judaism as a religion no longer exist. Some Chinese, however, know they are of Jewish descent. They are curious about their roots and are delving into their history. A growing number of Chinese scholars are also researching the subject.

We therefore have reason to expect to learn much more about Chinese Jews in the coming years: their origins, life, and contributions to Chi-

nese culture. No doubt my "tentative conclusions" will require substantial amplification and revision, which I gladly welcome.

*Sidney Shapiro makes his home in Beijing.*

#### WHAT MAY WE ASK OF HOLOCAUST REFLECTIONS?

*Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical  
Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*  
By Steven T. Katz  
New York University Press

*A Review essay by Hans Tiefel*

The reader who expects to find the content of this book to reflect its title will be both disappointed and pleased. Disappointed because almost half the text is devoted, not to a discussion of Holocaust themes, but to the analysis and critique of Martin Buber and Eliezer Berkovits. Pleased because just over half the book keeps the promise of the title by offering what surely is the most lucid and perceptive critique anywhere of major Jewish theologians of the Holocaust and by making a major contribution to the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

This is not to imply that the first three essays are wanting in any sense. The critique of Buber's epistemology, for example, sheds light on the shortcomings of existentialist writings generally: they do not take history seriously and do not offer much help for ethics. Similarly, the second and third essays are impressive in taking major Jewish scholars to task: Buber for misusing and distorting Hasidic sources and Berkovits for misreading Jewish scholars. But five of the nine essays have been published before, and the first three seem simply to have needed an additional home. They might be regarded as bonuses in the sense that a great artistic performance may offer encores of quite a different sort than the announced program.

Professor Katz applies impressive skills to analyzing and criticizing major Jewish authors who have struggled with questions of the Holocaust. He not only relates these authors to

one another and to common rabbinic and biblical traditions but enriches the arguments with philosophical discussions, both classic and contemporary. Katz proves a master at probing the logic of arguments. And here lies his greatest service to the reader. He insists that theological reasoning must be as cogent as philosophical analysis. Philosophy and theology thus differ not in regard to the canons of reasoning but in their starting points or presuppositions. Arguments of believers, therefore, are as accountable to good sense, criticism, and rebuttal as secular or philosophical claims—even, or perhaps especially, when one reflects on such intractable issues as the Holocaust raises.

There is not much that does not fade in the bright light of Katz's analysis and critique. Indeed the reader will be inclined to ask whether there is any truth in the land or whether there are any theological interpretations of the Holocaust that survive such severe testing. Richard Rubenstein is taken to task for psychological revisions that result in a mystical paganism—not all that different from Nazi ideology—in which the Jew is urged to forgo history and return to the cosmic rhythms of natural existence. He is criticized for dealing with the community's faith as if it were a theory or hypothesis confirmable or falsifiable by experience, for wanting to retain traditions without God when those traditions were formed in response to God, or for claiming that one may retain Judaism without a theology or without the God of history.

Emil Fackenheim retains the presence of God at Auschwitz but cannot link this presence adequately with the saving God of the Exodus: "If we are to count the *Sho'ah* as revelation, is it not the power of Satan that is disclosed rather than that of the 'living God'?" Katz also objects to Fackenheim's use of Midrash, to his concept of God, and to answers to the Holocaust that may simply reaffirm the faith rather than offer reasoned responses to Holocaust issues.

Katz questions Ignaz Maybaum's interpretation of the Holocaust as innocent, vicarious sacrifice through which God blesses humankind and asks whether being Jewish means primarily being a lamb led to the slaughter. Moreover, the Holocaust



does not lead to reconciliation but to alienation from God. Nor does Maybaum's concept of God fare better than Fackenheim's, for could the Lord of the covenant truly employ a "Hitler, my servant?"

Eliezer Berkovits emerges as the least objectionable of the four theologians scrutinized. But even he manifests serious weaknesses that affect the abiding values of his writings. Neither his "rabbinical learning nor the dependence upon the reference to the great Western tradition of theodicy is fully adequate to the issue of *Sho'ah*."

One could interpret such critical severity as an expression of theological intolerance, of contempt for interpretations and approaches the author finds to be incompatible with his own. In my judgment that would be a serious misreading of Katz's work. The quarrel is in-house, as it were. It is the commitment to a shared tradition and to the common effort of responding to an incredibly difficult task that both assures the freedom of drastic and severe inquiry and makes it obligatory. The interpretation of such liberty as inimical to the author's own approach would be mistaken in the additional sense that Katz does not offer and may not have sufficiently formulated his own answers to the questions raised by the authors he analyzes and opposes.

That lack of constructive effort proves to be consistently frustrating to the reader. Since Katz does such splendid work in describing, analyzing, and criticizing the major answers, why are these skills not directed to pointing us in more promising directions? If we are shown the avenues that turn into dead ends, might there not be more promising bearings detected by a guide so knowledgeable about the landscape?

Such a complaint may be both unfair and misleading. Unfair because sound analysis and criticism constitute services sufficient unto themselves. Misleading since the request for constructive alternatives may imply that the faithful live by good answers rather than by their covenant relationship with God. We may have to take our bearings from a Job who was satisfied with the divine presence and despises himself for his earlier questions. And yet the vision of

faith seeks clarity and coherence. It is a commandment to love the Lord with our whole mind. And in that task the community of faith inevitably looks to its best teachers for direction and help. Moreover Katz does not seem averse to that search in principle. He believes that we can talk about the Holocaust. He himself points to the need for "the formulation of a systematic and methodological skeleton of a philosophy of Judaism," which, one assumes, must be a post-Holocaust philosophy. Katz praises Jews of the past who coped with and interpreted the world's evil, who vindicated the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and who "made it possible for Judaism to survive by making Jewish experience and its inherent tragedy intelligible." Katz also keeps raising crucial questions that call for a constructive response: "What does it mean to be a Jew after Auschwitz?" "[D]id God enter into covenantal relation with Abraham and his heirs only so as to crucify them?" "Has . . . the God of Israel, of the Covenant, of redemption, become another casualty of the *Sho'ah*?" "[W]hy, if God performed a miracle and entered history at the Exodus, did He show such great self-restraint at Auschwitz?" And, when Katz reproaches Maybaum for not explaining the theological dilemmas posed by the Holocaust, he implies that such explanation is a legitimate and needed task.

Even where Katz finds Holocaust interpretations suggestive or promising, even where he hints at his own position, he remains reluctant to step into the breaches that his criticisms have inflicted on the theological structures of others. Flawed explanatory constructs crumble when he encircles them, but he seems unwilling to build anything more soundly designed and stable in their place.

Two examples shall illustrate that point. Katz finds helpful Berkovits's claims that "Jewish existence per se stands as prophetic testimony against the moral degeneracy of men and nations: it is a mocking proclamation in the face of all human idolatry and witnesses to the final judgment of history by a moral God." That belief sheds light on Israel's continued existence. But Katz refuses to say more than that, claiming that to do so would be to speak in the language of faith to which one can only

witness but not argue about. At that point, as at a few similar points in these essays, Katz implies that that is all that one can say, since he sees no way of convincing anyone who does not already believe it that Israel is God's people. But surely that constitutes a non sequitur. The main task of this book is to investigate questions of faith within the circle of faith. The issues of the Holocaust are primarily issues for believers, for the communities of faith. And here Israel's election and covenant will be assumed. Rather than ending the argument there, such declarations of faith must become the starting points for the task of comprehending whatever meanings there might be in the Holocaust. Therefore, belief in the covenant bond and the experience of undeserved suffering become places of departure for reflections about God's ways with His people and with His world and about the right human responses to His ways.

Katz's last essay, "The 'Unique' Intentionality of the Holocaust," provides the second example of the author's reluctance to offer constructive alternatives. He answers the question that so divides Jewish theologians by arguing that the Holocaust was indeed unique. And its uniqueness lies in the genocidal intent of the Nazis. But that answer disappoints for it is a historical answer to a theological question. Even if we agree with him that some forms of hatred are worse than others and that this genocidal intent was unique, what does that imply for the meaning of Jewish suffering and for the faith of Israel? Even if one agrees with his thesis that *this* Jewish suffering has no historical parallel, what does that imply for a faith that has encountered persecution at so many points in the past? Does the genocidal intent of the Nazis imply anything new for those who survived its devastation? And if Holocaust suffering is unique, what does that mean for the suffering of the non-Jewish victims of Hitler? Does such uniqueness deny solidarity with other human suffering?

It is not all that difficult to argue that a major historical event such as the Holocaust is unique historically. History in a sense is always unique in that we assume time does not repeat itself and every historical period is not only new but different. But what could be the non-trivial meaning of



any historical uniqueness? That meaning would have to be found in the traditions, self-understanding, and beliefs of the community that asks for the meaning of events. And the difficulty with the Holocaust is that it cannot be rendered meaningful by prevailing traditions and beliefs. Indeed one meaning of "uniqueness" is that we do not understand what the Holocaust means. It does not fit; it does not lend itself to any traditional concept of God's character; it does not make sense that His covenant people should suffer so; it does not accommodate itself to the going interpretations of suffering, whether the model be punishment, testing, redemption, or the absence of God.

When Katz concludes that the Holocaust was unique because of the genocidal intent of the Nazis, he begs the question. What is the meaning of that genocidal intent for the community of faith, for its understanding, worship, and imitation of God? Could it be that in not facing his own conclusion with such questions, Katz does not apply to himself the critical rigor he demands of others? His essay on uniqueness simply leaves us with the claim of historical uniqueness and never even raises theological questions that would make his thesis meaningful.

If Katz were to address the theological meaning of the Holocaust in a constructive effort, he might also shed light on the meaning of Israel's suffering. One gets the impression—though the author never explicitly says so—that the uniqueness of Nazi genocidal hatred created unique suffering on the part of Jews. But if suffering in the Holocaust was different from any other human suffering—either then, before, or subsequently—we inevitably ask what that means and implies. If one stresses the difference in suffering between Jews and other Holocaust victims (or victims at any time or place), what can Israel's Holocaust suffering mean for Gentiles? If one approaches the suffering of Jews with the conviction that this people is called into a covenant bond with God that also makes it a priestly community to the nations, must one not also ask what Israel's suffering means in relation to those nations? Will Israel's suffer-

ing—though it be the darkest night of humankind—shed any light on the suffering and hopes of others? For example, does it shed any light on the fact that, by and large, the Church did not suffer and retains its hope largely unaffected by the suffering of Jews? But Katz remains silent about what his own thesis would signify theologically.

This collection of essays, then, is strangely ambivalent in its effect. It offers the best analysis and critique of several, perhaps the main, interpretations of the Holocaust. But it submits nothing to replace what it proves to be wanting. The skill and brilliance demonstrated in the critical enterprise do not express themselves constructively. What then may we ask of Holocaust reflections? Surely the reader may ask for more than he is offered here. Indeed the very ability of the author may be seen as an implied promise. This author "owes" his readers more. Surely they will be able to look to him in the future for direction in a bleak landscape in which signposts either misdirect or are lacking altogether.

Hans Tiesel is professor of religion, The College of William and Mary.

## BOOK BRIEFINGS

*Victims and Neighbors.* By Frances Henry, with a foreword by Willy Brandt. South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc. This is a deeply personal and, at times, emotional account of the author's family's experience in a German village during the Nazi era, describing the relationship between the generations of Jews who lived there and their neighbors—the Gentiles and, sometimes, Nazis. It documents the day-to-day acts of kindness, charity, and protectiveness shown toward Jewish citizens by some of their German neighbors.

*The Jewish Family: Authority and Tradition in Modern Perspective.* By Norman Linzer. New York: Human Sciences Press, Inc. The relationship between the authority of the tradition and the autonomy of the

individual serves as the philosophical framework of this book. It is closely related to both the traditional and the modern Jewish family because the essence of children's growth and parents' self-development lies in the encounter of parental authority with child independence, and in their underlying values. The author's goal was to discover in the Jewish sources a framework from which to understand this issue in the contemporary Jewish family.

*Soloveitchik on Repentance.* By Pinchas Peli. New York: Paulist Press. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik is considered the unchallenged leader of enlightened Orthodoxy in North America. Peli has gathered together the main points of Rabbi Soloveitchik's teachings into this volume. It is a landmark work in that it records the brilliant thinking of the most famous Orthodox teacher in America.

*The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism.* By Abraham J. Heschel, edited by Samuel H. Dresner. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. These essays present portraits of four figures in the inner circle of the Baal Shem Tov, who founded the Hasidic movement in the early eighteenth century. They are filled with valuable historical information and Hasidic teachings in the form of legends, aphorisms, and anecdotes, and they constitute an invaluable contribution to the understanding of early Hasidism.

*Between Washington and Jerusalem: A Reporter's Notebook.* By Wolf Blitzer. New York: Oxford University Press. The U.S.-Israeli relationship is like no other, and in this book Blitzer explains why. He outlines the limits of the relationship, showing why neither country can afford an all-out confrontation. The book brims with fascinating vignettes of key individuals. Particularly illuminating is his exploration of the little known and even less understood strategic and intelligence cooperation between the two countries.

*A Jew Examines Christianity.* By Rachel Zurer. New York: Jenna Press. This book may be described as a scholarly "whodunit." Lively and often

startling insights, based on reliable scholarship sources, come to light in this study of the New Testament. The unfortunate anti-Jewish legacy, now being utilized in Middle East politics, has caused concern to Christians everywhere. They can learn here how that legacy arose and developed. Perplexed Jews will discover the explanation for two millennia of anti-Semitism.

*Coat of Many Colors.* By Israel Shenker. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. The author has spent a lifetime exploring Judaism as it was and as it is: the richness, humor, joys, sorrows, and sheer diversity of Jewish heritage. Shenker explores ancient sacred texts, from Torah to Talmud; argues with prominent Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Liebowitz; discusses art and assimilation with modern renaissance man Dr. Jonathan Miller; interviews writer Aharon Appelfeld and movingly bears witness to the Holocaust. It is a loving celebration of the Jewish experience.

*A Brotherhood of Memory: Jewish Landsmanshaftn in the New World.* By Michael R. Weisser. New York: Basic Books, Inc. The great majority of Jewish immigrants to the U.S. have quickly assimilated. Yet others, who rejected America's mobility and never learned English as a primary language, clung instead to the traditional values of their Eastern European shtetls. For these Jews, their shops and fraternal clubs were sufficient; the social ladder was not worth climbing. The focus here is on the *landsmanshaftn*, or fraternal organizations, such as social clubs, religious groups, and vocational societies that enabled these immigrants to recreate the customs and values of the Old World. Weisser interweaves personal stories and accounts of specific societies without prejudging these immigrants by the standards of the acculturated majority.

*Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation.* By Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. Boston: Beacon Press. Many feminists find themselves irreducibly alienated from the Christian tradition, based as it is on the Bible, which is written in androcentric language, imagery, and theology. The author neither dismisses biblical religion

altogether nor apologizes for its patriarchal structures. She recognizes the experience of women who have been oppressed by patriarchal texts as well as energized by the biblical vision of freedom and wholeness. She develops an entirely new critical paradigm for biblical interpretation—a feminist hermeneutics of liberation.

*Jews and German Philosophy: The Problems of Emancipation.* By Nathan Rotenstreich. New York: Schocken Books. The author demonstrates how German philosophy provided both a spur and a framework for much of modern Jewish thought. He traces the impact of Kant and Hegel on the thought of Mendelssohn, Samuel Hirsch, and Hermann Cohen, of Vico on Krochmal, Moses Hess, and Rosenzweig, and Nietzsche's influence on Zionist ideologues: Berdyczewski, Ahad Ha'am, and A.D. Gordon. He recreates the philosophical debate over Judaism against the turbulent backdrop of the Jewish struggle for German citizenship and spiritual integrity.

*God in the Teachings of Conservative Judaism.* Edited by Seymour Siegel and Elliot Gertel. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly. The 20 essays in this collection demonstrate that Conservative Judaism encompasses many theological approaches to the Jewish concept of God. Naturalist and pantheist stand side by side with biblicist, mystic, and radical theologians, all setting forth a diversity of views on

questions of faith, theodicy, the Holocaust, biblical criticism, the "death of God," and the teaching of God in Jewish education.

*Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945.* By Deborah E. Lipstadt. New York: The Free Press. Analyzing headlines, articles, and editorials published in newspapers and periodicals during the Holocaust period, the author shows that the press did not recognize anti-Semitism as a major concern deserving attention and response but, all too often, buried small stories with ambiguous headlines on inside pages. Faced with horrors too outrageous to be believed, the press chose to be skeptical instead, vastly understating the mass destruction of human life.

*Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements.* By Stephen Sharot. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. This study recounts the history of the currents of folk religion among the Jews, particularly since the Middle Ages, and provides a sociological analysis that examines possible explanations for them. Messianic, mystical, and magical tendencies within Christendom have been subjected to extensive treatment by various authors. Less attention has been paid to these tendencies in the sociology of Judaism. The author shows how frequently and how widely these various currents found expression.

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*Worlds Torn Asunder.* By Dov Beril Edelstein. Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc. This book is a first-person narrative by a survivor. It presents a microcosm of the Holocaust nightmare as seen introspectively by a religious youth who was torn away from the security of home and family and his comforting traditional environment, and thrown violently into a cold, merciless, incomprehensible reality. Steeped in Jewish lore and tradition, the narrator interprets his personal vicissitudes in light of the ancient tradition and historical experience of his people.

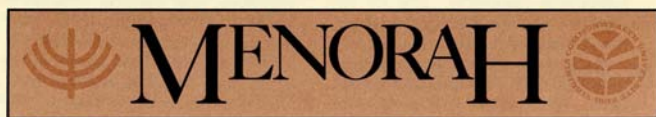
*Ancient Judaism.* By Irving M. Zeitlin. New York: Basil Blackwell. Beginning with Max Weber's classic work of the same name, Zeitlin takes a renewed look at how Judaism laid the foundations for rational thought, modern science, capitalism, and western culture. The author criticizes both those modern scholars who have cast doubts on the scriptural account of the history of Israel and those who hold that the religion of Israel originated either as polytheism or as a

fusion of Baal and Yahweh. He finds unconvincing the non-sociological modes of approaching these questions. Drawing on biblical and extra-biblical evidence, he addresses the question of how the actors concerned—whether they were patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings, or the people—understood themselves, their world, and their faith.

*Israel: The Partitioned State.* By Amos Perlmutter. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Throughout history, the borders of Israel have been constantly changing. The partitioning of the land, beginning with the British mandate, has only further added to Israel's fears for its national security. It is this struggle to define, defend, and expand those borders that has determined the nature of Israel's government and politics, according to the author of this comprehensive political history of Israel from the Balfour Declaration to the war in Lebanon. The book covers the rise of Zionism as a worldwide movement, the history of co-existence between Arabs and Jews in pre-

state Israel, European influence in the region, and how these themes affect current Arab and Israeli attitudes.

*None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948.* By Irving Abella and Harold Troper. New York: Random House. Out of the millions of European Jews looking for a place of refuge between 1933, when Hitler came to power, and 1945, when the Holocaust ended, democratic Canada—like the U.S., a "nation of immigrants"—admitted a paltry 5,000. After the fall of the Third Reich, until the founding of Israel in 1948 provided an alternate sanctuary for the survivors of the concentration camps, Canada admitted only 8,000 more. It is the worst record of all possible refugee-receiving states, and the author explains why. It is a harrowing story of political calculation, bureaucratic red-tapism, and bigotry.



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